

## **CLAS CIRCULAR**

### **2025/04 (10 March)**

#### **Disclaimer**

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It would be very helpful if members could let us know of anything that appears to indicate developments of policy or practice on the part of Government or other matters of general concern that should be pursued.

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## CHARITIES & CHARITY LAW

### Enhanced Charity Commission powers on hate speech and extremism

For information

The Government has [announced](#) plans to strengthen the Charity Commission's powers to close charities that promote extremism. Since October 2023, the Commission has opened over 400 regulatory cases for hate speech and made around 70 referrals to the police where criminal offences may have been committed.

Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy has asked officials at DCMS to work with the Commission to speed up the process for investigating charities suspected of engaging in extremist behaviour, including strengthening its powers to close them down if needed. This includes processing decisions more quickly and reviewing the appeals process. Further measures under consideration include:

- mandatory trustee ID verification;
- the digitisation of charity accounts; and
- strengthening local authority powers to issue fines and take other enforcement action to tackle unlicensed street fundraising.

There will shortly be a new consultation launching on the possibility of an automatic ban on individuals with a criminal conviction for hate crime from serving as charity trustees or senior managers. It will also consult on plans to strengthen the Commission's powers to disqualify individuals where there is evidence that they have promoted violence or hatred.

[Source: DCMS, 9 March]

## FAITH AND SOCIETY

### “Cohesive communities”, anti-Muslim rhetoric and antisemitism

For information

The UK Government has published a new policy paper: [Protecting What Matters: Towards a more confident, cohesive, and resilient United Kingdom](#). In the introduction, it announced that it is

“adopting a non-statutory definition of anti-Muslim hostility and will appoint a special representative on tackling anti-Muslim hostility. In addition to the range of actions the government has already taken to combat antisemitism, we will also act on the recommendations of Sir David Bell’s review into antisemitism in schools and colleges, and on the recommendations of Lord Mann’s review of how the healthcare system deals with antisemitism and other forms of racism. We will roll out training on religious hatred across the Civil Service”.

The non-statutory definition of anti-Muslim hostility (see Chapter 3) is as follows:

“Anti-Muslim hostility is intentionally engaging in, assisting or encouraging criminal acts – including acts of violence, vandalism, harassment, or intimidation, whether physical, verbal, written or electronically communicated – that are directed at Muslims because of their religion or at those who are perceived to be Muslim, including where that perception is based on assumptions about ethnicity, race or appearance.

It is also the prejudicial stereotyping of Muslims, or people perceived to be Muslim including because of their ethnic or racial backgrounds or their appearance, and treating them as a collective group defined by fixed and negative characteristics, with the intention of encouraging hatred against them, irrespective of their actual opinions, beliefs or actions as individuals.

It is engaging in unlawful discrimination where the relevant conduct – including the creation or use of practices and biases within institutions – is intended to disadvantage Muslims in public and economic life.”

The policy paper emphasises that it is not intended to resurrect the crime of blasphemy:

"We do not recognise blasphemy law in the UK and will ensure the Police are equipped to respond to ... incidents [*of intimidation, threats and harassment*] in a way that prevents public disorder and sectarianism and protects the freedom and safety of the public."

– and in a [statement to the Commons](#), the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Steve Reed, confirmed that "there is absolutely no question of blasphemy laws by the back door".

[Source: MHCLG, 9 March]

## PROPERTY & PLANNING

### Listed Places of Worship and the devolved administrations

For information

[In response to a Commons written question](#) from Katrina Murray (Cumbernauld and Kirkintilloch, Lab) about the financial pressures facing listed places of worship in Scotland in the context of changes to heritage and capital funding streams, the Minister of State at DCMS, Ian Murray, said this:

“Heritage funding is devolved; however, listed places of worship in Scotland have benefited from VAT rebate grants from the UK-wide Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, which ran from 2001 to the end of this financial year.

The Department conducted an evaluation of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme. Our evaluation showed that while it had many benefits, 80% of respondents said that they would still have carried out the work without the rebate. The evaluation included an extensive survey of current and past scheme users and is published [here](#):

We are aware that grants from the scheme will have benefited many recipients across Scotland, with a total of 1,513 Listed Places of Worship grant claims to a value of £6.9m being awarded to Scottish applicants since August 2022.

The Government has recently announced the Places of Worship Renewal Fund in England which will provide upfront capital support in the areas where it is needed most.

At Spending Reviews, the Devolved Governments generally receive Barnett consequentials as a proportion of overall departmental settlements, not specific funding lines or programmes. Barnett consequentials were confirmed taking into account the overall DCMS allocation, which includes funding for the Places of Worship Renewal fund. *Decisions on the allocation of this funding are then for the Devolved Governments to take.* [emphasis added].

In a [Lords written answer](#) to Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay (Con), Bs Twycross, the DCMS Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, reiterated the point:

“DCMS officials have ... met with counterparts in the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland to discuss the closure and confirm Barnett consequentials were applied as a proportion of overall departmental settlements.

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lines or programmes. Barnett consequentials were confirmed taking into account the overall DCMS allocation, which includes funding for the Places of Worship Renewal fund. Decisions on the allocation of this funding are then for the Devolved Governments to take.”

[Source: Commons and Lords *Hansards*, 9 March]

[In response to a written question](#) from Lord Parkinson (Whitely Bay, Cons) about what the ending of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme means for devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Gambling and Heritage and Lords Minister); Baroness in Waiting (Government Whip), Baroness Twycross (Lab) said this:

“I wrote to Angus Robertson MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, regarding the closure of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme. DCMS officials have also met with counterparts in the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland to discuss the closure and confirm Barnett consequentials were applied as a proportion of overall departmental settlements.

At the Spending Review 2025, HM Treasury agreed budgets for Departments for a three-year period for Resource DEL, and a four-year period for Capital DEL. The Department then completed a Business Planning process to allocate this funding to programmes. This included ?92 million (?23 million per year) for the Places of Worship Renewal Fund.

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[Source: Lords *Hansard*, 9 March]